

November 2003

1.12

Personal Essay

Benchmarks

In personal essays, students make connections between experiences and ideas. This is evident when students:

PreK-4:

A. Reflect on personal experience, or the experience of an imagined character, using the patterns of cause/effect, comparison, and classification.

5 -6:

- AA. Relate personal experiences to concepts patterns, and ideas;
- B. Trace the process of reflection, making connection between thought and experience; and
- C. Establish a commonplace, concrete occasion as a context for the reflection.

9-12:

D. Maintain a thoughtful voice and style.

8TH GRADE BENCHMARKS

“Cleaning Day”	5 / 3
“A Change of Scene”	5 / 3
“The Need to Be Bucked Off”	4 / 3
“Fourth Grade Without the Fun”	4 / 3
“Field Hockey Pre-Season”	3 / 3
“Two Peas in a Pod”	3 / 3
“The Wilderness”	2 / 3
“Although Being in the Eighth Grade”	1 / 3

VERMONT NEW STANDARDS RUBRIC FOR PERSONAL ESSAY: WRITING TO EXPLORE AND ANALYZE

Standard 1.12 In personal essays, students make connections between experience and ideas.

Criteria	Score Point 5 Exceeds the Standard	Score Point 4 Accomplished Writing	Score Point 3 Intermediate Writing	Score Point 2 Basic Writing	Score Point 1 Limited Writing
OCCASION FOR REFLECTION Something <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seen • Read • Overheard • Experienced 	Score point 5 meets all the criteria listed in score point 4 and offers even more. This paper memorably presents the occasion for reflection, often deals with fine detail of the naturalist or autobiographer setting up a reflection that is exceptionally thoughtful and convincing.	Presents occasion through the effective use of concrete details; sensory language; narrative accounts, using pacing, dialogue, action; and/or quotations (purpose). May recount single stimulus or a web of related experiences or observations (organization & detail).	May be brief or the occasion may dominate (purpose). May take the form of a preconceived generalization to be explained rather than explored.	May take the form of autobiographical illustrations or a single incident (purpose).	Occasion for reflection may be omitted or presented only in the title (purpose).
REFLECTION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring • Analyzing 	The paper presents ideas in an original fashion, using imaginative yet precise language in its attention to subtleties of thought. This paper often shows a metaphoric use of language. In some notable papers, the writer's presentation of the occasion is at the same time a reflection; here the reflection is implicit, embedded in a way that leads the reader from the specific to the abstraction that underlies it.	Is thoughtful, convincing, insightful, exploratory. Reflection is firmly grounded in the occasion (context). Expresses integral connection between experience and ideas (purpose). Analyzes ideas by looking at them from multiple angles and/or moving through successively deeper layers of meaning (detail). Explores an abstraction in both personal and general reflection (detail).	May be thoughtful but predictable, grounded in occasion rather than reflection (context). Establishes connection between experience and ideas (purpose). Generally takes the form of reasons or supporting statements for a preconceived generalization; may be convincing, but not exploratory (detail).	Reflection may be a simple statement of belief or may be implicitly embedded in the title or topic sentence (context). May be limited to superficial generalizations.	May be little or no evidence of reflection (context). May be in the form of a simple, obvious statement.
ELABORATION STRATEGIES, DETAILS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using specific, concrete details • Comparing, contrasting • Naming, describing • Reporting conversation • Reviewing the history • Explaining possibilities • Creating a scenario 	These papers reveal a deepening insight, sometimes expressed as wonder, and may end with a conclusion but without a sense of conclusiveness.	Uses a variety of strategies both in the occasion and throughout the reflection (detail). Is attentive to the particulars of observation, recounting them effectively as a way of grounding the reflection.	Shows purposeful use of strategies for elaboration (detail). Uses some detail and sensory language (detail).	Shows little purposeful use of strategies for elaboration (detail). May be limited to lists of details or of generalizations.	No attempt to elaborate or may attempt to elaborate by repetition of initial statement.
COHERENCE AND STYLE		Achieves coherence through natural progression of ideas, not through application of external organizational patterns (organization). Uses precise and appropriate language (voice & tone).	Coherent, often relying on external organizational patterns rather than lines of thought. Uses predictable patterns, word choices, details.	May have lapses in coherence. Stays generally on the topic but may have some internal digressions. Uses simple, generic language.	Lapses in coherence, lack of organization. Simple, generic language with no sentence variety.

Score Point 0 Unscorable There is no evidence of an attempt to write a personal essay.

This rubric is adapted from materials created by the New Standards Project.

Cleaning Day

One Saturday morning, when the sun was beginning to rise a little bit later and you could feel that the coming of autumn was just around the corner, my mother declared a dreaded, but truly needed cleaning day.

My family of five, plus dog, stood at the ready, preparing to take on the many tasks that lay before us with a somewhat jovial manner. As the minute hand hit the twelve and the chimes of our grandfather clock proclaimed that the hour of nine had arrived, we zoomed into action like an overanxious tornado just touching down. As my sister manned the vacuum and my brother tackled the windows, I made my way upstairs, still rubbing the sleep out of my eyes. I heaved a great sigh as I entered the room, knowing, but not dreading, the long day that was yet to come.

Firstly, I began to empty my drawers and closet of anything that resembled a piece of clothing and proceeded to dump them onto the already incredibly messy floor. Before joining the mountainous pile of clothes, I turned on my radio, attempting to drown out the noise of the cleaning procedures going on below me. As I took out the first piece of clothing, which was a way too small, neon green tee shirt, I began to wonder why I kept all these clothes in the first place. I mean most were stained with something and a lot looked like the chance of me fitting into them was one in a million. Then, suddenly the answer swooped down on me, like a hawk on it's prey, for as I held that small, green shirt a memory came tumbling back to me. *I was running along as fast as my little legs could carry me, all of me completely focused on a very frantic peacock that lay about two feet*

away. Then suddenly from out of the blue I collided with what was definitely not a peacock, but M.J., who always happy face sported the widest grin I had ever seen. And as this vivid memory came to an end, I swear I could almost feel the tender spot where I had hit the ground.

Next, I picked up a somewhat worn blue tank top with a large rust colored streak on one side and suddenly, *I was on top of an elephant, holding on for dear life. My hands gripped the arm rests with so much force that they were beginning to cramp and next to me I could feel my friend Ned shaking out of both excitement and nerves. Around me was a jungle, the likes of which you only see in books and on my arm landed the biggest bug I had ever seen. With one hand holding on tight, I let go with the other and flicked the bug off. I then realized that my hand was covered with rust-colored dirt that had been on the arm rest. So before I proceeded to hold on again, I wiped my hand, on the side of the tank top I was wearing.*

With each new piece of clothing I held in my hands I was transported back to a different place and time. And as I began to pick up more and more clothes and be a part of more and more memories, I became completely engulfed by the world they showed me.

If minutes, hours, or even days passed I couldn't tell, for when I finally emerged from my world of thoughts, I found the humongous pile of clothes neatly sorted in the Salvation Army box, including the small, neon green shirt and the blue tank top. And as I

sat there no longer surrounded by my clothes and memories, I began to feel like I was losing something very important to me, almost like my best friend. Then suddenly, as if someone else was controlling my body I began to remove the specific items of clothes from the box and to once again lay them on my floor. And as I did so, a flood of relief swept over me, for I wasn't ready to let go of these memories just yet.

As life continues to roll by at its normal way-too-fast pace, I sometimes look back on that day I sat sorting through my clothes and it makes me think. For now, each time I put on a brand new shirt or pair of pants, I pause before the mirror for a second. A second where I wonder what these clothes will some day show me and try to imagine what part of me they will someday become. But when all other thoughts are gone one lone question remains on the horizon of my mind; next cleaning day will these be the clothes I keep or the ones I give away? And as that second finally ends and that question is still vivid in my mind, it's as if something has come over me, for my once dreaded day, has not become an opportunity to make new memories and discover more of my future.

Cleaning Day

One Saturday morning, when the sun was beginning to rise a little bit later and you could feel that the coming of autumn was just around the corner, my mother declared a dreaded, but truly needed cleaning day.

Writer presents the occasion—cleaning day—with effective use of concrete details and sensory language, including simile

My family of five, plus dog, stood at the ready, preparing to take on the many tasks that lay before us with a somewhat jovial manner. As the minute hand hit the twelve and the chimes of our grandfather clock proclaimed that the hour of nine had arrived, we zoomed into action like an overanxious tornado just touching down. As my sister manned the vacuum and my brother tackled the windows, I made my way upstairs, still rubbing the sleep out of my eyes. I heaved a great sigh as I entered the room, knowing, but not dreading, the long day that was yet to come.

Writer continues to set the stage for the reflection

Firstly, I began to empty my drawers and closet of anything that resembled a piece of clothing and proceeded to dump them onto the already incredibly messy floor. Before joining the mountainous pile of clothes, I turned on my radio, attempting to drown out the noise of the cleaning procedures going on below me. As I took out the first piece of clothing, which was a way too small, neon green tee shirt, I began to wonder why I kept all these clothes in the first place. I mean most were stained with something and a lot looked like the chance of me fitting into them was one in a million. Then, suddenly the answer swooped down on me, like a hawk on its prey, for as I held that small, green shirt a memory came tumbling back to me. *I was running along as fast as my little legs could carry me, all of me completely focused on a very frantic peacock that lay about two feet away. Then suddenly from out of the blue I collided with what was definitely not a peacock, but M.J., who always happy face sported the widest grin I had ever seen. And as this vivid memory came to an end, I swear I could almost feel the tender spot where I had hit the ground.*

Connection between experience (the shirt) and ideas (the wondering/reflection)

Figurative language

Memory is a form of reflection

Next, I picked up a somewhat worn blue tank top with a large rust colored streak on one side and suddenly, I was on top of an elephant, holding on for dear life. My hands gripped the arm rests with so much force that they were beginning to cramp and next to me I could feel my friend Ned shaking out of both excitement and nerves. Around me was a jungle, the likes of which you only see in books and on my arm landed the biggest bug I had ever seen. With one hand holding on tight, I let go with the other and flicked the bug off. I then realized that my hand was covered with rust-colored dirt that had been on the arm rest. So before I proceeded to hold on again, I wiped my hand, on the side of the tank top I was wearing.

← *A web of experiences: concrete details bring on a second memory, described with sensory language*

With each new piece of clothing I held in my hands I was transported back to a different place and time. And as I began to pick up more and more clothes and be a part of more and more memories, I became completely engulfed by the world they showed me.

Writer generalizes the experience

If minutes, hours, or even days passed I couldn't tell, for when I finally emerged from my world of thoughts, I found the humongous pile of clothes neatly sorted in the Salvation Army box, including the small, neon green shirt and the blue tank top. And as I sat there no longer surrounded by my clothes and memories, I began to feel like I was losing something very important to me, almost like my best friend. Then suddenly, as if someone else was controlling my body I began to remove the specific items of clothes from the box and to once again lay them on my floor. And as I did so, a flood of relief swept over me, for I wasn't ready to let go of these memories just yet.

Writer goes to a deeper layer of meaning: feeling about the memories

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and try to imagine what part of me they will someday become. But when all other
thoughts are gone one lone question remains on the horizon of my mind; next
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has come over me, for my once dreaded day, has not become an opportunity to make
new memories and discover more of my future

*Writer expresses
deepening
insight; the
conclusion
leaves the reader
with something
to think about*

Score Point 5

In this personal essay, the tone is thoughtful and convincing as the writer explores and analyzes the memories brought on by finding clothing while cleaning. The reflection is firmly grounded in the occasion and then carried to a deeper level of abstraction: the memories that await the writer in the future. This deepening insight and a thoughtful, convincing conclusion that ends without a sense of conclusiveness are Score Point 5 criteria.

Conventions – Score Point 3

The writing demonstrates control of grade-level conventions.

A Change of Scene

It was 1997, and I had just switched schools. I had never been to public school before so I was confused. In my writing class I had just gotten my first final draft back. I looked at and saw an A-. I had no idea how good that was, but I didn't want to show my bewilderment. So I just sat down and looked at it. Just then Ned, one of my fellow classmates, saw it.

“That's good, Colin.”

I still wasn't sure, so I just put in my finished pieces folder and went on with the rest of the day.

Later that day I was in the car with my dad, driving home. I asked him, “Dad, how good is an A-?”

“That's good! Why do you want to know?” he answered.

“Because I got one on my piece and I wasn't sure if it was good or not.”

-It's amazing-I thought to myself. It is really surprising how different this is from my old school. One change and I have no idea where I fit in. I do well and don't even know it.

Thinking back on it now, I realize that that's what it's like in life. Nothing is stable and changes cause confusion. You enter a new job and it's like entering a new world. You don't fit in and don't know what to do. If you don't have a friend moving with you, you don't know anybody for quite a while. Everything is chaos and you need to learn to live with it.

Now, in Eighth grade, I have overcome some of my initial confusion about the school and am almost getting on top of the chaos. So changing schools was a good thing for me. It prepared me for things to come, for my life ahead of me.

In spite of these revelations the world carries me on in its ever-chaotic wake. It is almost two years since I got that first grade, and I am just about to graduate and move to a new school and another leg in the wheel of chaos. Four years after that, I will graduate from High School. From there I will travel to college for another stretch of chaos, and the adjustment that follows inevitably in its wake. So it becomes clear that life is only a revolving wheel of chaos, slowly moving from chaos melting into a period of stability and swiftly back to chaos once again.

Looking back I see that the change from chaos to tranquility is some of a conscious effort, and some just comes naturally, and is uncontrollable. The more times you go out of chaos and come into control, the easier it becomes. But you can only improve to a point. There is always going to be some friction, stopping you from reaching the stability that is lurking around every corner.

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Transition

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Occasion is a narrative account with effective dialogue

Essay goes from specific—the change in schools-- to abstract—change leads to chaos

Transitions establish a natural progression of ideas

Reflection is grounded in the occasion

another stretch of chaos, and the adjustment that follows inevitably in its wake. So it becomes clear that life is only a revolving wheel of chaos, slowly moving from chaos melting into a period of stability and swiftly back to chaos once again.

Metaphoric use of language; writer explores deeper layers of meaning

Looking back I see that the change from chaos to tranquility is some of a conscious effort, and some just comes naturally, and is uncontrollable. The more times you go out of chaos and come into control, the easier it becomes. But you can only improve to a point. There is always going to be some friction, stopping you from reaching the stability that is lurking around every corner.

Conclusion leaves reader with something to think about

Score Point 5

This personal essay explores the idea of change with a convincing and insightful tone. There is a strong connection between the occasion—change in schools—and the idea that life revolves from chaos to stability. The writer uses transitions skillfully and repeats the idea of chaos to achieve a smooth progression of ideas. The writing concludes without a sense of conclusiveness.

Conventions – Score Point 3

The writing demonstrates control of grade-level conventions.

The Need to Be Bucked Off

It started out like any other day, I went out to the barn with my dad to brush and ride my horse. I brushed him unenthusiastically; there was nothing special going on there, but eventually I got the job done. I did not realize it then, but I have learned a lot of responsibility through owning a horse. If I do not brush Sneaky, it is most likely that he does not get brushed. If I do not give him treats and reward him for good behavior...you guessed it, he does not get rewards for being good, and eventually he might stop being good altogether.

After brushing my horse, we tacked him up and went out in the ring to ride. My mom was mowing the lawn just outside of the riding ring, and this scared Sneaky a little. I reassured him that the tractor was not going to jump up and grab him by squeezing with my legs a little to urge him to go forward. I think that was the reason that Sneaky did not totally freak out is because he trusts me. Trust is a very important part of riding a horse, because if the horse does not trust you, his behavior will reflect this. The horse usually won't respond well, which is bad. Sneaky trusted me, though, so we continued riding around.

After a couple more times around the ring, Sneaky lost that trust and he started flipping out. It was as though he had joined the rodeo as a bucking bronco. Finally he bucked me off, and I went flying. I sailed through the air and landed hard on my head. It really hurt, my head was spinning and my shoulder ached, but I got up and just stood there for a couple of minutes, thinking to myself, "I don't think that it is a good sign when you see stars in the middle of the day." Sneaky was still bucking and running, so my dad went over and caught him. I knew that if I did not get back on my horse, he

would think that he got away with being bad and bucking me off. So, I did what I had to do, and after I stopped feeling dizzy, I got back on. I was pretty scared, and my heart pounded, because I did not like the idea of being bucked off again, but I did not let that stop me. We started going around the ring again, and everything was fine...for a while. I think that Sneaky must have been pretty worked up about the whole experience, because he was acting skittish and did not seem sure of himself. He started to buck again, although not as severely, and I did not fall off that time. When he stopped, and I figured out that I was still on, I was very happy. Not just because I did not fall off and hurt myself, but because I was a good enough rider to actually stay on. This made me very confident in myself. I wasn't as afraid of falling off after that because I knew that I had the ability to stay on. This experience did not just make me a more confident rider though; it made me a more confident person. I am surer of myself everywhere that I go now.

I am grateful to my parents for giving me the chance to own a horse. It has taught me to be responsible, to care for another living thing. The responsibility of owning a horse also helped me learn to manage my time, because it is hard to fit everything in. I am more confident thanks to my horse. He taught me it's okay to be afraid, but not to be a coward. Even though the event kind of hurt physically, it changed me mentally and pushed me to be a different, more confident person. I am grateful to Sneaky, and I guess that I really needed to be bucked off.

The Need to Be Bucked Off

It started out like any other day, I went out to the barn with my dad to brush and ride my horse. I brushed him unenthusiastically; there was nothing special going on there, but eventually I got the job done. I did not realize it then, but I have learned a lot of responsibility through owning a horse. If I do not brush Sneaky, it is most likely that he does not get brushed. If I do not give him treats and reward him for good behavior...you guessed it, he does not get rewards for being good, and eventually he might stop being good altogether.

Reflection strategy:
explaining possibilities

After brushing my horse, we tacked him up and went out in the ring to ride. My mom was mowing the lawn just outside of the riding ring, and this scared Sneaky a little. I reassured him that the tractor was not going to jump up and grab him by squeezing with my legs a little to urge him to go forward. I think that was the reason that Sneaky did not totally freak out is because he trusts me. Trust is a very important part of riding a horse, because if the horse does not trust you, his behavior will reflect this. The horse usually won't respond well, which is bad. Sneaky trusted me, though, so we continued riding around.

Occasion established
with concrete details

Reflection: analyzing
the relationship

After a couple more times around the ring, Sneaky lost that trust and he started flipping out. It was as though he had joined the rodeo as a bucking bronco. Finally he bucked me off, and I went flying. I sailed through the air and landed hard on my head. It really hurt, my head was spinning and my shoulder ached, but I got up and just stood there for a couple of minutes, thinking to myself, "I don't think that it is a good sign when you see stars in the middle of the day." Sneaky was still bucking and running, so my dad went over and caught him. I knew that if I did not get back on my horse, he would think that he got away with being bad and bucking me off. So, I did what I had to do, and after I stopped feeling dizzy, I got back on. I was pretty scared, and my heart pounded, because I did not like the idea of being bucked off again, but I did not let that stop me. We started going around the ring again, and everything was fine...for a while. I think that Sneaky must have been

Reflection embedded
in the occasion

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Writer explores impact of the event on herself

I am grateful to my parents for giving me the chance to own a horse. It has taught me to be responsible, to care for another living thing. The responsibility of owning a horse also helped me learn to manage my time, because it is hard to fit everything in. I am more confident thanks to my horse. He taught me it's okay to be afraid, but not to be a coward. Even though the event kind of hurt physically, it changed me mentally and pushed me to be a different, more confident person. I am grateful to Sneaky, and I guess that I really needed to be bucked off.

Writer extends the reflection to what he/she has learned

metaphor

Score Point 4

This personal essay meets the criteria for a Score Point 4. The writer uses a variety of elaboration strategies to explore and analyze an incident with her horse, as well as the larger benefits of owning a horse. There is a natural progression of ideas and appropriate language.

Conventions – Score Point 3

The writing demonstrates control of grade-level conventions.

Fourth Grade Without the Fun

Fourth grade was probably the worst year of school that I had ever endured. I lived in Northrup, New York at the time, and I seemed pretty happy. I had a nice house, with a pool and a hot tub. I had a bunch of close friends and I seemed to be having a great time. I tried my hardest to look happy, but inside, I was really hurting.

I remember Horace Elementary School like I am there right now. When you first walk in, you see the cafeteria, and whatever the school was having for lunch, that's what you smelled. Walking down the hallway, it smelled like books, pencils, and glue. I was in Mrs. Baker's class and I was keeping up pretty well with my grades. It was a two story school and on the bottom were the exciting classes like gym, art and band. The school was pretty strict, but it worked out okay. I loved that school, but I did not like Sally.

She was the most popular girl at Horace. As stupid as it sounds, I was very jealous of her. She was well liked by everyone, and everyone did exactly what she said. I don't know why she didn't like me. Maybe it was the first time I ever met her. She was looking for a pencil and I said I didn't have one, even though I did. But I didn't want to give it to her because I knew I would never get it back. Anyway, no matter what I said or did, she hated me. I don't mean dislike, I mean Hate with a capital H. She would pick on me all the time. For reasons as stupid as my socks didn't go with my shoes. I tried telling her that I didn't care but by then the whole school was staring at my feet. Okay, maybe I'm exaggerating a little bit, but that's what it felt like.

Some times I would come home almost in tears because of some of the horrible things she would say to me. Just mean things that she loved to say to me. I hated it, I was going through hell. I would get home and my parents would act all concerned and then

call up Sally's parents. The next day, I knew, would be worse because now Sally would say something like, "Lily went home and cried to her Mommy and her Mom called up my Mom! What a baby!" Which of course would just make my life even more miserable. After a while, I learned to hide what I was feeling, no matter how much it hurt.

They only thing about Sally is you could not hate her, or even dislike her. She could have the whole fourth grade against you in a flash. I remember Melinda said she disliked Sally. I know what you're thinking. With a name like Melinda you wouldn't be surprised that she was a loser, but she didn't start off that way. Some one told Sally that Melinda didn't like her, and then suddenly everyone disliked Melinda. I kind of envied Sally for this power that she had, and yet I hated her for using it.

You would have thought that I would have been more than happy to leave that school. Well, when my parents told me that we had to move, I was so upset. I hated having to leave where I grew up, even though I hated the place. I was so full of mixed emotion. I would find myself crying all the time for no reason. I remember I told Sally that I was moving. She thought it was a ploy for attention. I went through hell again until Mrs. Baker announced it in front of the class. Boy did Sally feel stupid then.

Then everyone who thought I was a dork or a geek, became my closest friend because they thought they would never see me again. I was too naïve at the time to figure this out, I thought they all really liked me. I can still see Sally's face when she confronted me in the gym. She looked all sympathetic and she invited me over to dinner at her house. I was so depressed because we were moving the day that Sally wanted me to her house. A chance to go to Sally's and I missed it.

Then the day came. My parents picked me up at school. I said my final good bye's. I just walked out of school like any other day. We got in the car and drove to Vermont. Vermont where my life ended and where it began. I was so sad in that car ride.

School in Vermont was so different than New York. There were less cliques and the whole learning style was different. I made friends relatively fast and was having a lot of fun in this place where I thought only Hicks lived.

Looking back, I realize how much I hated it in Northrup. I sometimes go back to visit my friends and they come to visit me. I don't miss Sally and I don't miss fourth grade. But I don't know what kid of person I would be if I hadn't gone through that. Maybe I needed fourth grade without the fun.

Fourth Grade Without the Fun

Fourth grade was probably the worst year of school that I had ever endured. ←

Occasion

I lived in Northrup, New York at the time, and I seemed pretty happy. I had a nice house, with a pool and a hot tub. I had a bunch of close friends and I seemed to be having a great time. I tried my hardest to look happy, but inside, I was really hurting.

I remember Horace Elementary School like I am there right now. When you first walk in, you see the cafeteria, and whatever the school was having for lunch, that's what you smelled. Walking down the hallway, it smelled like books, pencils, and glue. I was in Mrs. Baker's class and I was keeping up pretty well with my grades. It was a two story school and on the bottom were the exciting classes like gym, art and band. The school was pretty strict, but it worked out okay. I loved that school, but I did not like Sally. ← **More specific on occasion/ focus**

Specific, concrete details and sensory language set context for the occasion

She was the most popular girl at Horace. As stupid as it sounds, I was very jealous of her. She was well liked by everyone, and everyone did exactly what she said. I don't know why she didn't like me. Maybe it was the first time I ever met her. She was looking for a pencil and I said I didn't have one, even though I did. But I didn't want to give it to her because I knew I would never get it back. Anyway, no matter what I said or did, she hated me. I don't mean dislike, I mean Hate with a capital H. She would pick on me all the time. For reasons as stupid as my socks didn't go with my shoes. I tried telling her that I didn't care but by then the whole school was staring at my feet. Okay, maybe I'm exaggerating a little bit, but that's what it felt like. ← **Writer's voice is thoughtful and convincing**

Concrete details with reflection (underlined) embedded throughout

Some times I would come home almost in tears because of some of the horrible things she would say to me. Just mean things that she loved to say to me. I hated it, I was going through hell. I would get home and my parents would act all concerned and then call up Sally's parents. The next day, I knew, would be worse because now Sally would say something like, "Lily went home and cried to her Mommy and her Mom called up my Mom! What a baby!" Which of course would

Reflection is grounded in the occasion

just make my life even more miserable. After a while, I learned to hide what I was feeling, no matter how much it hurt.

They only thing about Sally is you could not hate her, or even dislike her. She could have the whole fourth grade against you in a flash. I remember Melinda said she disliked Sally. I know what you're thinking. With a name like Melinda you wouldn't be surprised that she was a loser, but she didn't start off that way. Some one told Sally that Melinda didn't like her, and then suddenly everyone disliked Melinda. I kind of envied Sally for this power that she had, and yet I hated her for using it.

Reflection and concrete details

You would have thought that I would have been more than happy to leave that school. Well, when my parents told me that we had to move, I was so upset. I hated having to leave where I grew up, even though I hated the place. I was so full of mixed emotion. I would find myself crying all the time for no reason. I remember I told Sally that I was moving. She thought it was a ploy for attention. I went through hell again until Mrs. Baker announced it in front of the class. Boy did Sally feel stupid then.

Reflection and concrete details

Then everyone who thought I was a dork or a geek, became my closest friend because they thought they would never see me again. I can still see Sally's face when she confronted me in the gym. She looked all sympathetic and she invited me over to dinner at her house. I was so depressed because we were moving the day that Sally wanted me to her house. A chance to go to Sally's and I missed it.

Writer looks at the experience from multiple angles

Then the day came. My parents picked me up at school. I said my final good bye's. I just walked out of school like any other day. We got in the car and drove to Vermont. Vermont where my life ended and where it began. I was so sad in that car ride.

School in Vermont was so different than New York. There were less cliques and the whole learning style was different. I made friends relatively fast and was having a lot of fun in this place where I thought only Hicks lived.

Looking back, I realize how much I hated it in Northrup. I sometimes go back to visit my friends and they come to visit me. I don't miss Sally and I don't miss fourth grade. But I don't know what kid of person I would be if I hadn't gone through that. Maybe I needed fourth grade without the fun.

Writer ends with reflection

Score Point 4

This personal essay is smoothly organized and has much personal reflection embedded throughout the elaborated description of the writer's fourth grade year. The tone is thoughtful and convincing, as the writer expresses the connection between her experience and her ideas about it. The writing does not demonstrate an attempt to go to either a deeper level or an abstraction and, thus, stays at a score point 4.

Conventions – Score Point 3

The writing demonstrates control of grade-level conventions.

Field Hockey Pre-season

It was a warm, cloudy morning, in mid-August. A Couple of days ago my sister had started to practice a little for field hockey pre-season, and once in a while I would go outside to see what she was doing. She would blabber about what kinds of things they did at field hockey practice and what she should do to get ready for tryouts, but of course she barely did any of that stuff. This was the day I made one of the mistakes I will regret for the rest of my life. The funny thing, though, is that before this happened I would say that I wouldn't care and that it would even be funny, but now I know it's not funny at all.

On that day my sister was practicing different kinds of field hockey passes and shots, and I wanted to hit the ball a couple of times also. She had two field hockey sticks so she let me use the one that was chipped, no surprise there. A couple of names of the shots and passes I can remember are the push pass, which is just a basic pass, and the drive, which is used primarily to shoot the ball. Most of the time we were outside I tried the drive and complained to my sister about how stupid I thought the rules for field hockey were. I guess the rules did make sense though.

A while later it started to drizzle but only for a short period of time, so we decided to continue what we were doing. Then my brother came out and this is when things turned bad. He was taking out the trash, and after he was done he asked me if he could try hitting the ball a couple of times. "Hold on," I said, but he wouldn't stop there.

"Come on, just let me try once then you can have the stick back," he said trying to convince me.

A bit annoyed by his persistence I said to him, "Just let me hit the ball one more time then you can try." Too bad he wasn't a bit more stubborn at the time, I guess he was

in a good mood. If he had been a bit more mulish, I'm not saying that it was his fault, I many not have taken that last drive. He stood aside, and I raised the stick slowly, prepared to give the ball a good slam. I swung and made an awful mistake. I had swung the stick too hard, and that made me miss the ball. The momentum kept the stick in motion and it didn't occur to me that I should stop the stick's movement, since my brother was standing right behind me. I felt the field hockey stick hit something, then I looked back only to see what I hoped didn't happen but knew did. My brother was lying on the ground, hands over face, and crying. I had hit him in the face on the follow through of the swing. My sister ran over when that happed and then said, "Go inside quickly and get some ice." I rushed to the house, went inside, and then ran up the stairs. I went to the freezer, and once my mom saw me she knew something was wrong. "What happened," she asked worriedly as my sister walked in the door with my brother. It was a horrible sight to see. My brother's cheek had swollen up to the point that it looked as if there was a golf ball in his mouth. I could tell he was in a lot of pain since he was crying and he barely ever cries. I could tell my mom was worried and so was I. However my mom reacted quickly. She sat him down on the couch and got some ice on his face.

That day I learned an important lesson. Once saying I've heard before, "Look before you leap" is really connected to what happened then. I say this because if I had thought to tell my brother to get out of the way before I swung at the ball, this whole ugly incident would have been avoided. But I didn't, and we had to pay the consequence.

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Clear context / occasion

On that day my sister was practicing different kinds of field hockey passes and shots, and I wanted to hit the ball a couple of times also. She had two field hockey sticks so she let me use the one that was chipped, no surprise there. A couple of names of the shots and passes I can remember are the push pass, which is just a basic pass, and the drive, which is used primarily to shoot the ball. Most of the time we were outside I tried the drive and complained to my sister about how stupid I thought the rules for field hockey were. I guess the rules did make sense though.

*Occasion,
described with
concrete details,
dominates*

A while later it started to drizzle but only for a short period of time, so we decided to continue what we were doing. Then my brother came out and this is when things turned bad. He was taking out the trash, and after he was done he asked me if he could try hitting the ball a couple of times. "Hold on," I said, but he wouldn't stop there.

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A bit annoyed by his persistence I said to him, "Just let me hit the ball one more time then you can try." Too bad he wasn't a bit more stubborn at the time, I guess he was in a good mood. If he had been a bit more mulish, I'm not saying that it was his fault, I many not have taken that last drive. He stood aside, and I raised the

Reflection

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*Some
reflection
embedded in
the occasion*

That day I learned an important lesson. Once saying I've heard before,
"Look before you leap" is really connected to what happened then. I say this because
if I had thought to tell my brother to get out of the way before I swung at the ball,
this whole ugly incident would have been avoided. But I didn't, and we had to pay
the consequence.

*Reflection--centered
on a "preconceived
generalization"-- is
tacked on to the end*

Score Point 3

The occasion dominates this personal essay. The writing is thoughtful, but predictable; the writer explains, rather than explores, ideas. The reflection at the end seems externally imposed. There is not a strong connection between the experience and the ideas.

Conventions – Score Point 3

The writing demonstrates control of grade-level conventions.

Two Peas in a Pod

A best friend is someone you can trust. A best friend understands you. A best friend can laugh with you. A best friend is someone you like being with. Emily and I are best friends!

Emily and I met last year in seventh grade and since then, whenever we're together, we always laugh. One time, I commented on her laugh. I said she had a different laugh every time she laughed. She started laughing again, in a different laugh and we ended up on the floor laughing so hard we were crying. Other times, we will just see something funny and both of us will start laughing. For example, a couple of weeks ago, we were walking off my porch and I just had to point at this squirrel that had a tail that looked like a rat tail. We both started laughing. Some times I tell her stories about stuff that happens in my home like when my sister and her friend were dancing to the Spice Girls song "Stop" and they didn't know I was watching. Other times she tells me stories about stuff that happens in her home like when her little sister ran in to their glass sliding door. We just end up laughing. Whether it be something small or big, stupid or intelligent, we can always find something to laugh about.

It is plain and simple to see that Emily and I enjoy spending time with each other. Just last night we went to the movies. We have spent the night at each other's house many times. On Halloween, we went trick-or-treating together along with our other friends Kathleen and Dora. If we are with a group of people, or just by ourselves, we have fun spending time together and enjoy one another's company.

Trust is important in any relationship. Emily and I trust each other. I can tell her who I like and she won't tell anyone. She can tell me about things going on with her

parents and I won't tell anyone. If we didn't trust each other we couldn't be best friends. There are some things that I wouldn't tell anyone else, like personal things going on with my family, but I tell Emily because I know that I can trust her. When Emily tells me her secrets I don't tell anyone because I know how it feels to have a secret get out. I wouldn't ever want to embarrass her the way I was embarrassed when I was in fifth grade. This kind of trust does not happen over night; Emily has shown me that she is trustworthy.

We confide in each other. We understand each other even with the smallest of gestures. We laugh every time that we are together. We like to be with each other. We are like two peas in a pod. Emily and I are best friends!

Two Peas in a Pod

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*Preconceived
generalizations
to be explained*

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Concrete examples
support
generalization, but
reflection is
superficial

It is plain and simple to see that Emily and I enjoy spending time with each other. Just last night we went to the movies. We have spent the night at each other's house many times. On Halloween, we went trick-or-treating together along with our other friends Kathleen and Dora. If we are with a group of people, or just by ourselves, we have fun spending time together and enjoy one another's company.

*Reflections
about
friendship are
thoughtful, but
predictable*

Trust is important in any relationship. Emily and I trust each other. I can tell her who I like and she won't tell anyone. She can tell me about things going on with her parents and I won't tell anyone. If we didn't trust each other we couldn't be best friends. There are some things that I wouldn't tell anyone else, like personal things going on with my family, but I tell Emily because I know that I can trust her. When Emily tells me her secrets I don't tell anyone because I know how it feels to have a

secret get out. I wouldn't ever want to embarrass her the way I was embarrassed when I was in fifth grade. This kind of trust does not happen over night; Emily has shown me that she is trustworthy.

Some connection between experience and ideas

We confide in each other. We understand each other even with the smallest of gestures. We laugh every time that we are together. We like to be with each other. We are like two peas in a pod. Emily and I are best friends!

Repetition of preconceived generalizations

↖ *Cliché*

Score Point 3

This personal essay describes and explains a particular friendship, rather than exploring the idea of friendship. The tone is thoughtful but the ideas are predictable. Reasons are convincing but not exploratory. Much of the language is generic, with some listed detail.

Conventions -- Score Point 3

The writing demonstrates control of grade-level conventions. There are a number of comma errors, but they do not interfere with meaning.

The Wilderness

When I go to bed in my tent I feel the hard rocky ground, cold and rough. I am in my sleeping bag. It's warm but not quite as comfy as my bed at home. I have a little something that reminds me of home, like a pillow and stuffed animal. After a long night's sleep, I wake up and feel a crick in my neck and a back ache.

I get out of my tent and stretch. I take my first deep breath of cool, fresh air. I hear the birds singing their songs. The crisp sun warms my face. The smoke from the fire burns my eyes, but I don't mind. I can get so many good things out of fire like food, warm heat, and contentment.

When I am camping, I feel happy and free. I love the feeling of being with nature and feeling free to do what I want. Camping makes me happy because I feel like I don't have any problems; I leave them all at home. When I'm at the fire (usually at the left corner) I listen to the crackle of the fire. The heat usually gets to me so I have to move back. The time I always think is at night with me, the stars and the big sky. I usually think about my family and what school is going to be like in the following year. The night was cold, but I had a good time. I may do it again sometime!

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*Writer lists
details*

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Simple statement of belief

When I am camping, I feel happy and free. I love the feeling of being with nature and feeling free to do what I want. Camping makes me happy because I feel like I don't have any problems; I leave them all at home. When I'm at the fire (usually at the left corner) I listen to the crackle of the fire. The heat usually gets to me so I have to move back. The time I always think is at night with me, the stars and the big sky. I usually think about my family and what school is going to be like in the following year. The night was cold, but I had a good time. I may do it again sometime!

*Attempts at reflection
are superficial
generalizations*

*Tense change affects meaning
of the piece: was this one
experience or something the
writer does often?*

Score Point 2

There is confusion in this piece whether the author is writing about camping in general or one incident in particular. The writer attempts to use sensory language but the effect is a list of generic details.

Conventions –Score Point 3

The writing demonstrates control of grade-level conventions.

Although Being in the Eight Grade

Although being in eighth grade is similar to being in seventh grade, I have changed in a year in lots of ways. More was expected of me in general this year. It really has not been a tough year.

More homework was asked of me this year. I have done more homework than I did last year. I guess that is because I know I have to do it so I can stay on the team. It is even fun helping others with their homework.

I have grown taller and become better at soccer and basketball. This is good because I play more in each game as I become better. My skills are also better this year.

Being an eighth grader is not tough. I think that before I become a ninth grader I will change some more. My teacher hopes this is for the better.

Although Being in the Eight Grade

Standard 1.12
Grade 8 Personal essay
Score Point – 1 /3

Occasion

Although being in eighth grade is similar to being in seventh grade, I have changed in a year in lots of ways. More was expected of me in general this year. It really has not been a tough year.

Reflection is simple, obvious statement

More homework was asked of me this year. I have done more homework than I did last year. I guess that is because I know I have to do it so I can stay on the team. It is even fun helping others with their homework.

I have grown taller and become better at soccer and basketball. This is good because I play more in each game as I become better. My skills are also better this year.

Repetition of initial statement

Being an eighth grader is not tough. I think that before I become a ninth grader I will change some more. My teacher hopes this is for the better.

Score Point 1

This attempt at a personal essay has little evidence of reflection. The only attempt to elaborate is repetition of the initial statement: “eighth grade...really has not been a tough year.” Simple statements of fact are listed without connections to each other.

Conventions – Score Point 3

The writing demonstrates control of grade-level conventions.